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THE RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK

Christian Principles and Industrial Reconstruction

FRANCIS J. McCONNELL

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COMMITTEE ON THE WAR
AND THE RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one in a series appearing from time to time under the general heading, The Religious Outlook. These publications are being brought out under the auspices of the Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook in the hope that they may help to focus attention on some of the larger issues facing the Church after the war.

The Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook was constituted, while the war was still in progress, by the joint action of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America and the General War-Time Commission of the Churches "to consider the state of religion as revealed or affected by the war, with special reference to the duty and opportunity of the churches, and to prepare its findings for submission to the Churches." Full reports of the Committee will be submitted later in the year. In the meantime the present series of booklets issued under the auspices of the Committee, is offered as a preliminary endeavor to emphasize certain phases of the task of the Church that particularly challenge its attention at the present hour.

Communications designed for the Committee may be addressed to the Secretary, Rev. Samuel McCrea Cavert, 105 East 22d Street, New York.

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CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES AND INDUSTRIAL RECONSTRUCTION

Any Christianity worthy of the name is by nature radical in the sense that it aims at the roots of things. A Christian plan for social reconstruction must therefore take account of the economic basis on which a better society is to be built. The struggle for daily bread is the largest single fact in the life of the vast majority of men in any community. The Christian problem is largely to introduce into the economic struggles of individuals and of groups the principles and spirit of the Gospel of Jesus.

The Human Values

The fundamental ethical teaching of Jesus is the supreme worth of every personality in the sight of God. The primary interest of Christianity in all economic problems is, therefore, that human values shall be kept in the first place. If modern societies could once be made to act upon the simple principle that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth, that all social

institutions are made for man, not man for the institutions, and consequently are to be judged by their effect on men, women, and children, the longest single stride toward the bringing in of the Kingdom of God on earth would have been taken. For this principle, once set to work, would quickly reach out to most vital implications.

In the first place, the Christian emphasis on the inherent worth of human personalities would at once take them out of the realm of instruments and make them ends in themselves. In a sense it is of course permissible to speak of a man as an instrument; but not in the sense implied in much industrial and social discussion. To speak of men as "hands," or as composing a "labor market," is innocent enough so far as the intentions of ordinary conversation are concerned, but the very prevalence of such terms fits in with the existence of a sinister idea in modern industrial life. Courts are more and more holding that labor cannot be viewed apart from effects on laborers. A really Christian sentiment ought to run far beyond court decrees and the enactments of legislatures and hold up the ideal of human personalities as ends in themselves for whom all tools—from the simplest hammer to the most complex steel mill—exist. Any tasks which unduly weaken

men or women or children, or which leave them no leisure for recreation and education, or which reduce them to cogs in a mechanism, or which lessen their sense of self-respect, must be increasingly turned over to machinery or so distributed as to lighten the loads. Better adopt the suggestion of having unescapably heavy drudgery handled by a process of compulsory social regimenting—every man taking his turn at the drudgery—than to have a class of human beings who can never look foward to anything but drudgery. If any inhumanly heavy work must be asked of human beings it should be made so costly in the price paid for it as to keep the work in the narrowest limits and to reward the worker with unusual opportunity for leisure and self-development. There is something Christian in the paradox that the meanest tasks should receive the highest pay.

Competition and Cooperation

A genuinely Christian emphasis on the human values in modern society would also hasten the transition from a competitive to a cooperative basis in industry. The Christian conception of the will of God for human society is that men should live together in a brotherhood of mutual service. Just what form such a

cooperation would best take there is no reason for our trying to state. All advances of this sort must proceed by the method of trial and error. But a competitive system whereby one man's gain means depriving another of the elemental necessities of life is fundamentally contrary to the spirit of Christ. Competition in sports, or rivalry in intellectual or artistic endeavor for the sake of the noblest result, is exhilarating and even inspiring. But competition for food and clothes and shelter is not suggestive of a Christian commonwealth. The stakes in such a game are too high. A Roman gladiatorial contest, in which success meant life and defeat death, no doubt pushed the gladiators to superhuman feats of strength and skill; but such contests were pagan. If the survival of the fittest means that in the race for food the stronger are to crush out the weaker by remorseless competition the doctrine is pagan. Competition in an industrial realm is essentially selfish; and there is no way of making selfishness Christian by calling it enlightened self-interest. Just to ask the question as to whether we could think of competition for the necessary material goods as obtaining in a Kingdom of God on earth is to answer the question. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." To construe New Testament meek-

ness in terms of economic competitiveness would be something of an exegetical feat. No; Christianity can only mean the organization of society on a basis of unselfishness—and that demands some form of economic cooperation.

The inability of the Christian to tell offhand just what form of cooperation would be best is not a count against cooperation but a challenge to socially-minded Christians to inventiveness and discovery. For the way simply must be found. Does anyone doubt that economic competition on an international scale was one of the compelling causes of the Great War? Without at all subscribing to the Marxian doctrine of the materialistic interpretation of history we must all admit the possibility, in a world of economic competition, of the passion for material supremacy sweeping an entire nation into a maelstrom of false patriotism, false militarism and false religion. The only remedy is a true patriotism which conceives of national destiny in terms of service, a true doctrine of the use of force which maintains order and conquers nature, a true religion which exalts the glory of mutual aid. As soon as we speak of cooperation with the highest human values as the goal we feel that we are in a New Testament atmosphere. To ask, "What would Jesus do?" is of course one way

to beg a question, for we cannot always tell what Jesus would do in a world like ours; and we may unwarrantably take an instinctive shrinking at the picture of Jesus in a strange situation as a condemnation of the situation. But there can be little doubt of the glaring contradiction between the spirit of modern industrialism and the spirit of Jesus.

Earning What One Gets

The Christian insistence on the human values goes hand in hand with an emphasis upon service as the great motive in life. And in the light of the principle of service it is inevitable that we insist that every Christian make it the ideal of his life as a member of society to earn what he gets. Of course we have to part company with the doctrine that only the manual laborer earns anything. In fact, this doctrine is at a heavy discount even among manual laborers themselves, for they teach that the worker who does not put brains into his work is useless. But the obvious fallacy in the doctrine that only the manual laborer is an earner should not lull us into self-complacency as to the income which we receive. The present writer has never been able to convince himself that the socialistic attack on the ethical validity

of interest, for example, is fully warranted. If capital is tools, there is an advantage in having tools in great numbers, or of large size, whose accumulation is made possible by saving. It is hard to see the justice of an attack on the savers whose saving makes possible the huge tool enterprises of today. But this statement does not excuse the saver from responsibility as to the kind of tools his savings create, or the use to which they are put. If the tool is used in a socially harmful way the saver and lender is not earning the money which he receives. The only possible moral justification for the payment of interest lies in a social service rendered in accumulating the money: if the money is not used in a socially beneficial way how can the lender be said to earn his interest return? And, furthermore, who owns the tools that capital creates? Just the capitalist? Does not the man whose skill controls the tool, who is master of it in the sense that he uses it, gain at least part ownership in it?

We would not have the doctrine that a man must earn what he gets interpreted too narrowly. Some men are socially worth while by the very fact that they are what they are; but all such considerations must be held up to the light of a genuine Christian honesty. For the Christian himself the ideal to be worth to

society all one receives from society will be compelling.

Seeing That Others Get What They Earn

As an ideal of true relationship to his fellows the Christian will also insist that men get what they earn. In the distribution of wealth it may well be that in the present state of society we can only attain to a sort of rough justice; but at least the aim should be justice. Absentee owners in plenty and daily toilers in want—this contrast is more and more shocking the conscience of Christendom. Because we are shocked at the callousness of the absentees? No, they may not be callous—they may be philanthropists. The uneasy stirrings of conscience come out of suspicion that the absentees who do nothing are getting the goods which belong to the presentees who do everything. The actual drawing of lines here is a delicate task—and let every man charitably judge his fellow—but the problem is one in that fundamental social justice which was so often the theme of the Hebrew prophets and which is central in the entire Gospel of Jesus. Is it consistent with Christian principles that those who simply furnish the capital should receive all the surplus profits that accrue from the work of those who produce the goods? Orthodox poli-

tical economics will have to give way before orthodox views as to the worth of a man's life.

Organized Labor

But how are these human values, which we have been insisting upon as of primary importance, to be given effective recognition and protection? The workers answer that they can safeguard their human rights only by some form of organization for collective action. And as a matter of fact the labor union seems to be the greatest single factor in securing and preserving such conditions as afford fuller opportunities to the workers. The non-union man, therefore, eats the fruit planted and cultivated by the unionist. Yet many an employer considers himself very democratic when he announces that he will deal with employes only as individuals, that men must stand on their own feet, that he himself rose rung by rung up the ladder. He forgets that he is the spokesman of organized capital whose dollars form a tight union with which labor can fairly cope only if it is likewise organized. Simple ordinary fairness, therefore, ought to lead to a recognition of the rights of labor also to organize for more effective action.

But it is argued that labor sometimes uses its increased power in a selfish way. Unfortunately this is true, as is also the case with capital's

use of its great power. The principle of organization, however, is not invalidated in one case more than in the other. To both the employer and the employe the Christian Church must say that all industry is to be conceived as a service in the interest of the common good.

Further, the union in its brotherhood, in its opportunities for discussion and debate, provides for an enlargement and enrichment of the personal life of the worker which can be supplied by nothing else in modern industrialism and which is absolutely essential if the worker is not to be mechanicalized into a mere part of the machinery. In the old days the worker very often was responsible for a completed product. He made the shoe or the coat from beginning to end. He had a chance to develop a sense of craftsmanship, a professional pride, a trace of the aesthetic, which is impossible in present-day factories. The only feature of the laborer's life that is in any way a substitute for the old condition is the trade union—with its appeal to loyalty and its opportunities for participating in the consideration of problems of common interest.

And when we speak of discussion we get close to a central problem in democracy. A great objection to democracy today is that its units are too big. An intelligent and in the end

effective democracy must discuss, and discuss, and discuss, and then vote something which has real significance for life. Where is there a better unit for the discussion and voting which are essential to democracy than a labor union? To begin with, the issues at stake are much more vital than those of ordinary political debate. The speakers know better what they are talking about than do most disputants over ordinary political themes, and, finally, the action at last taken calls for a larger sense of responsibility than the ordinary political voting. For if the laborer votes for or against a strike, for example, the consequences of his decision soon reach him and his wife and children. A wise educator once said that he believed in manual training because if a student with a tool makes a mistake he cuts his finger; whereas a merely intellectual blunder has no such immediately noticeable consequences. The trade union is a great school of democracy because effects of wrong votes for men or measures so quickly become manifest.

Democracy in Industry

If we were to have trade unions only as debating societies and as agents of mutual benefit for workers quite likely the employers would welcome them. But in a society approaching

more and more closely to democracy, trade unions will increasingly insist on a proportionate share in the management of industry itself. Inasmuch as the workers contribute to production the indispensable factor of their toil and skill, the Christian thinker must recognize the fairness of labor's insistence upon being heard in all adjustments which have to do with the industry. The battle for a voice in wage-fixing has been pretty well fought through; but industrial democracy really implies more than such collective bargaining in wages and hours. It implies that labor shall be heard in all questions which have to do with the conditions in which the laborer works, with the shop and its control, with the control of the industry itself through place on boards of directors. The trade union is fighting and winning a great battle against paternalism. Capitalists are not as a rule moved by impulses to oppression. Undoubtedly the majority of them mean well by their men. They are willing to do all within their power for the men except to let the men have the power to do for themselves. But paternalism is an insidious foe to democracy. In all ages the kindly king, the benevolent lord, the gentle slave-holder, the charitable master have been as effective supporters of falling regimes as have cruel representatives

of their various classes. Especially is this true when the paternalism is accompanied by real efficiency. But efficiency—in spite of the orthodox economist—is not the last word when taken in a mere material sense. We must aim at an efficient society as a whole, and a society efficient in the highest sense. Such a society can come only through making the most of the growing independence of men, and requires the application of the democratic principle to industry as well as to government.

But why does Christianity or the Church have any concern in democracy? Because democracy is the very child of Jesus' teaching of the infinite worth of every personality. It is a social implication of this fundamental Christian principle. How democracy is to be applied to industry it is not the function of the Church to say, but it is clearly her duty to insist that it must be applied. In securing democratic industrial organization, collective bargaining now seems necessary as a first step. But from the Christian point of view, it is only a first step. It is too susceptible of becoming only a competitive struggle for selfish advantage over other groups. The Christian ideal is not a class struggle and a class triumph but a cooperation on all sides for the good of the whole community.

The Christian social ideal is not only a brotherhood of service, but it is a brotherhood that is inclusive of all mankind. Industrial democracy, however, does not necessarily and of itself lead to such international good will, nor will it inevitably bring about world-wide peace. The democracy needs to be interfused with the Christian spirit. If an industrial society has been built around the use of force, with quick resort to direct action rather than to reason and sympathy, such a society may become as militaristic as an aggressive monarchy. We must not confuse ourselves with the fancy that democracy will not start upon warlike careers. The democratic movement must not be allowed to halt at the frontiers of any one nation: for democracy cannot indeed exist with the world half democratic and half autocratic or reactionary. But even democracies may fall to quarreling among themselves. Hence the need of unceasing insistance upon Christian ideals of mutual respect among nations, even after they shall have become democratic in political and social and industrial organization.

So much for nations which are measurably alike and equal. But the family of nations is composed of groups some of which have had

larger opportunities for development than others. Christian principles call for special solicitude on the part of the more favored nations toward the so-called backward nations. For example, a highly organized industrial democracy might find its own supplies of coal and iron running short, and a neighboring backward people might at the same time be holding possession of great supplies of the desired materials. Or a democracy of thrifty citizens may have invested sums of money in enterprises in a backward country which has trouble in keeping order within its borders. In such circumstances —which are far from abstractly hypothetical— only a compelling Christian spirit would keep the stronger nation from violence. Such a danger might be most acute if the investors in the democratic nation were great in number and had invested small sums out of hard-earned funds. The peril would be all the greater if the issue were between peoples actuated by strong racial prejudice. All of which means that democratic progress must throughout be infused with the Christian spirit.

Some Practical Suggestions for the Church

In all such discussions as this we meet the very legitimate objection that an essay which insists that democracy is of the very essence of

Christianity should advance further than a mere statement of principle—that it should seek to throw light on ways in which organized Christianity can actually take hold and help in concrete situations. To do this fully would be out of the question, for the problems are intricate and vast and, as we have said, must be attacked by the method of trial and error at the hands of experts in social engineering. We may, however, hazard two or three suggestions.

In the first place, as soon as an economic or social force is clearly seen to be evil the Church must be willing that her prophets attack it. To this end it is imperative that the Church keep alive within herself the spirit of prophetic radicalism. Granted that the Church has a right to close her pulpits to those who are clearly astray on the great Christian fundamentals, those fundamentals must never be so treated as to make emphasis on the human values a heresy.

Again, it should be the aim of the Church to seek to fill modern social progressivism with the spirit of Christ—an aim to be realized only as preachers and laymen conscientiously set themselves to understand the doctrine and the point of view of radical social groups. We can not hope to make this indispensable contribution to the solution of social problems unless we really

appreciate the significance of the industrial and social unrest surging about us.

Once more, it is the business of the Church to do her part toward creating the social atmosphere in which change for the better takes place without violence, in which evil dies out and good comes to birth. A childish reader of the geological story asks who finally killed all the frightful monsters that once splashed about in prehistoric swamps. It may take the child some time to realize the full significance of the answer that nobody killed them—the climate changed, and they died.

And there are also ways in which the Church in its own activities can itself exemplify the ideals that it preaches. Perhaps even more significant than the suggestions offered above is it to remember that there are at least three spheres in which the Church has the direct opportunity to show in industrial and social terms the spirit of Jesus, for (1) the Church is an investor of funds; (2) the Church is an employer of labor; and (3) the Church through her missionary enterprises comes into close relations with the forces of modern internationalism.

In these days of huge church campaigns which collect funds by the scores of millions of dollars some of the funds find their way to interest-

bearing investment. Do those in charge of such investments always ask as to the character of the enterprise from which the interest comes? Has money gone into interest that should have gone into better tenements, or into better shop ventilation, or into safety appliances, or into wages, or into a profit-sharing plan?

Moreover, these are days when the Church herself is an employer on a considerable scale. Church publishing houses do business running into millions a year. Has the Church always realized her opportunity to take the lead in industrial progress in her own enterprises? Is there not here a field for trying out advanced plans of collective bargaining and profit-sharing and the recognition of labor through positions on boards of directorship?

Finally, the mission field is a great sphere in which the Church can set over against modern political and industrial imperialism the essential democracy of Christianity. The missionary, who thinks of the enterprise of his Church as aimed at reaching men, women, and children just for their own human sake, is,—whether he realizes it or not,—the possible corrective for the trader who thinks of raw materials and labor markets, and for the diplomatist who schemes for spheres of influence. The one doctrine to put against the exploitation of weaker peoples

by stronger is just that fundamental of Christian democracy, that even these so-called weaker peoples are among those for whom the Lord Christ died.

The Full Length

It may seem strange that a discussion of social reconstruction—particularly a discussion that proceeds from the Christian point of view—should deal so largely with economic questions. The reason is not hard to find. Because of the fact that bread-winning is so much a part of men's lives—in most instances so nearly all of the life—Christianity must deal with doctrines and methods which have to do with bread-winning. We cannot have anything like a Christian society unless our bread-winning is to be organized in such a way as to make brotherhood really possible. The Church can never admit any divorce between religion on the one hand and economic and industrial organization on the other. No aspect of human life is exempt from the rule of Christ, least of all that side of life which necessarily demands most of the thought and effort of the great majority of men.

There is little question but that democracy will go the full limit until it reaches and grasps the processes by which men earn their daily

bread. The current of the times is clearly set in that direction. The question for Christian men and women, therefore, is whether this coming democracy is to be fundamentally Christian in its spirit. For us there can be but one answer. Christianity must keep pace with the democratic movement, must go the full length with it, keeping ever at its heart the human values that lie at the center of the Gospel of Christ.